

WASHINGTON, DC - Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) released the following statement today after the State of Maryland unveiled a new dental project that will help provide oral services to children in Prince George's County. The project, which will make oral care available through a mobile dental office, is named in memory of Deamonte Driver, a Maryland boy who died in early 2007 of complications stemming from an untreated tooth infection.

"The death of Deamonte Driver was a tragedy beyond comprehension and a wake-up call that exposed the extreme consequences of a health care system that is inaccessible and unaffordable for many," stated Rep. Hoyer. "Answering that call, Maryland has made great progress in helping to improve oral health services for children in the state. I commend Governor O'Malley, Secretary Colmers, state health care advocates and all those who have made it a priority to ensure that Deamonte's case is never repeated."

At the federal level, Maryland's Congressional delegation fought to include a guaranteed dental benefit in legislation to reauthorize the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) - the federal-state health program for low-income children. President Bush twice vetoed SCHIP legislation that included the dental benefit and extended coverage to ten million children. With the current authorization set to expire in March 2009, SCHIP is expected to be one of the top priorities in the next Congress.

"Despite the overwhelming support of Members of Congress and the American people, President Bush went against his own campaign promises and blocked legislation to extend health care coverage for low-income, uninsured children," stated Rep. Hoyer. "We can't allow children like Deamonte to fall through the cracks of our health care system any longer. In the next Congress, under President-elect Obama and with stronger Democratic majorities in Congress, enacting children's health care legislation will be a top priority."

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